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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
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INFO RUEHBH/AMEMBASSY NASSAU
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 001338

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - REMOVE ZEN

SIPDIS
DEPT FOR CA/FPP

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [CVIS](#) [SMIG](#) [KFRD](#) [OEXC](#) [DR](#)
SUBJECT: Troubling Overstay Rate for Santo Domingo Summer Work Program

SUMMARY

¶1. Post's validation study for the 2008 J1 Summer Work Travel (SWT) shows a 24 percent overstay rate. Of those who stayed in the U.S., 38 percent were previous SWT visa holders with good travel. Post met with J1 summer work recruiters to show them their individual overstay rates and to strongly encourage them to implement better screening of their applicants in 2009. Post also changed its informal criteria for approval of J1 summer work visas based on the findings of the validation study. END SUMMARY.

METHODOLOGY

¶2. We selected our applicant pool using CA/FPP procedures as outlined in the Validation Studies section of the Fraud Prevention intranet site. Instead of taking a random sample, Post considered all 1065 visas that were approved for the SWT program between February and July 2008.

¶3. Officers tracked the selected applicants' whereabouts primarily using come-back letters, entry and exit records, and follow-up phone calls. If we did not receive a comeback letter, we checked ADIS for entry and exit dates. If there was no record in ADIS, we contacted the applicant by phone to determine if s/he had returned to the Dominican Republic. Based on the list of overstays, we calculated rates for each individual recruiter and further investigated each case looking for similarities and/or trends. We also reviewed whether applicants who overstayed had prior J1 or B1B2 visas.

RESULTS

¶4. For the 2008 J1 summer work travel program, Post adjudicated 2173 visas of which 1065 were issued, reflecting an overall refusal rate of 51%. Of the visas issued, two hundred and fifty one of the applicants did not return to the Dominican Republic at the conclusion of the program, indicating an overstay rate of 24%. As of January 2009, ADIS records and follow-up phone calls revealed that none of the 251 overstays had subsequently returned to the Dominican Republic.

¶5. A closer review of NIV records for the students who did not return revealed some interesting trends. While lack of specific adjudication notes made it difficult to determine a correlation between the rate of no return and issuance criteria, such as grade point average (GPA) and English proficiency, Post learned the following:

-- 38% of overstays held prior J1 visas, suggesting that the first J1 travel may have served as a sort of scouting trip to develop contacts and set up more permanent work for the next trip. This finding was troubling for the consular officers as many would routinely issue visas to applicants who had travelled well on a prior J1 visa.

-- Many of the students who did not return were in their mid to late 20s, having either changed majors or started college late. Several of the students also only had 1-2 years left to complete their studies. Being behind their peers or having almost completed their education correlated to an increased likelihood of overstay.

-- Unlike previous SWT experience, previous B1/B2 visa issuance was a good indicator of appropriate use of the SWT program. Only 1% of the 251 students who stayed already had a B1/B2 visa.

CONCLUSION

¶6. An informal review of the 2007 SWT Program's overstay rates revealed that 31% of participants stayed in the United States after the end of the program. This led Post to adopt stricter standard criteria for J1 visa issuance in 2008. Generally, officers expected more advanced levels of English fluency and a minimum GPA of 3.0, with the expectation that more serious students would be more likely to return to finish their degrees. Post also met with the SWT recruiting companies and encouraged them to adopt stricter screening practices.

¶7. While the overstay rate dropped significantly, from 31% in 2007 to 24% in 2008, it is still too high and it has prompted officers at Post to reconsider SWT visa issuance criteria. Informal standards generally adopted for SWT visa adjudication in 2009 include: possession of a B1/B2 visa, exceptional English skills, at least 2 years of school remaining, lack of strong family ties to the U.S., and a GPA of 3.2 or higher. The stricter criteria has led to a higher visa refusal rate for 2009, from 51% to 64%. Unfortunately, preliminary follow-up recently conducted at Post suggests there is still a very high overstay rate in this category. Given the persistent problem with this particular program, Post plans to complete another validation study for the 2009 J1 Summer Work Travel Program to determine if current visa adjudication standards are sufficiently rigorous.

Lambert